

Life History of Cassie Hilts, MOT, OTR/L

“That’s how I view all of my interactions, through the eyes of an occupational therapist”.

Nichole Arn, OTS and Mackenzie Funke, OTS

Introduction

Purpose

This life history report is one of 29 life history interviews which are a part of a larger project, *Life History of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota and Wyoming*. The purpose of the project is to gather information through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing practice in North Dakota and Wyoming. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information. This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from it’s inception to current practice in North Dakota and Wyoming.

Literature Review

❖Cassie mentioned that the emphasis of occupational therapy changed over the years. According to Reed & Peters (2008), between 1970 and 1985, the professional identity of occupational therapy experienced a shift.

❖During 1970-1985, the profession of occupational therapy changed current theories (Reed & Peters, 2008). Cassie discussed in her interview, that occupational therapy created theories of it’s own after she had graduated. She stated that the profession began to stand alone and did not rely on other professions as much during this time.

❖When Cassie began her first job as an occupational therapist, in a mental health setting, she did not feel like she was working as an occupational therapist. Cassie felt this way because she was often working with social workers. According to Reed & Peters (2010), the role and impact of occupational therapy was unclear up until the 2000’s.

❖According to Dillon (2001), leaders must lead through serving others and their needs. Cassie implements this type of leadership everyday as she educates students and serves as the director of a professional program.

Methodology

A life history approach was used to interview the participant. This was guided by the Kawa model. Initial contact was made by the course instructors. The interview was completed by UND occupational therapy students, using a semi-structured interview format. The interview was completed at the participant’s workplace and lasted one hour. The instructors provided a semi-formatted interview script that could be adapted and personalized for the participant. The researchers were allowed to add or modify interview questions. Post interview, data was transcribed verbatim and coded to find themes, categories and assertions. Trustworthiness was established using the verbatim transcription, researcher debriefing, and peer reviews.

Participant: Cassie Hilts

Current Position

❖Occupational therapy assistant Program Director and Instructor, Northland Community and Technical College (NCTC)

Past Positions

Occupational Therapy Practitioner

❖Psychiatric/Chemical Dependency Unit, Altru Hospital

❖Northeast Human Service Center

Instructor

❖Occupational Therapy Department and Distance Education Department, University of North Dakota

❖Occupational Therapy Assistant Program, NCTC

Extended Care and Treatment Coordinator

❖Northeast Human Service Center

Licensure

❖National Board for Certification of Occupational Therapy

❖Vocational College Teachers License

❖Licensed Occupational Therapist in Minnesota

About Cassie

Cassie is currently a program director and instructor for the occupational therapy assistant program at Northland Community and Technical College in East Grand Forks. She began instructing in 1989 at the University of North Dakota. Cassie began instructing to create a connection and cement her identity as an occupational therapist. She continues to instruct because she enjoys being able to relate to students and help them problem solve.

Outside of the Occupational Therapy Profession, Cassie is heavily involved in her family life. She had two children while in college and in the beginning of her career. Now, she enjoys spending time with her grandchildren.

Data Analysis

Personal Experiences

Cassie’s personal experiences revolve around her roles and family. Her roles as a mother, wife and grandmother have impacted her throughout her time in the field of occupational therapy. When she began her career as an occupational therapist she cared less about her work. Her focus at that time revolved around her family. Now that her children are grown, she cares a lot more about the impact she makes on the community and her students at Northland Community and Technical College.

Work Experiences

Cassie entered the field of occupational therapy (OT) as the sole mental health OT practitioner at her facility. When working in this area, Cassie recognized the importance of a health care team and how underserved mental health is in Grand Forks, ND. She believes that this is because it is a rural town.

She then moved on to work as an educator, first for the University of North Dakota and now at Northland Community and Technical College. Cassie enjoys instructing because it allows her to relate to students through what she experienced while practicing mental health OT. She believes that she has the ability to listen and provide comfort to students who are struggling in a challenging academic environment.

Along with instructing at NCTC, Cassie also is the director of the occupational therapy assistant program. As the program director, she has recognized that there is a lack of collaboration between occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants. She explained that this is not only in school, but also when practicing within the occupational therapy field.

Occupational Therapy Practice

Cassie believes that as the profession has aged and continues to age, there is a stronger presence of occupational therapy (OT). She also feels that there is a greater emphasis on research and occupation today.

Throughout time, occupational therapy has implemented it’s own theories and degree requirements. With these implemented requirements, the profession continues to grow and change. Currently, Cassie does not agree that obtaining a doctorate degree for an occupational therapist or a bachelors degree for a occupational therapy assistant is necessary for the growth of the profession. She does hope that more occupational therapy research articles become available as a product of the increased educational standards.



Photo courtesy of: Cassie Hilts, MOT, OTR/L

Conclusion

Through the Life History of Cassie Hilts, it was discovered that she has experienced both personal and professional growth, as the profession of occupational therapy continues to progress.

The impact that occupational therapy has had on Cassie Hilts influences the way she looks at her life everyday, not only at work but also in her personal life. Personally, her roles and family have had a huge impact on how she approaches work everyday, especially since her family has grown from two children to a full family, including grandchildren. Along with her family having an effect, her work experience has also had an impact on her. She wants to give back to her community and students by actively listening and comforting these individuals. Cassie believes she has seen great growth within the profession. There has been an increase in research, theories, and requirements for the profession. She also mentioned the increased emphasis on occupation. Overall, Cassie feels that she has experienced the change of a constantly changing profession.

References

- Dillon, T. H. (2001). Authenticity in occupational therapy leadership: A case study of a servant leader. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 55, 441-448.
- Reed, K. L. & Peters, C. O. (2008). Values and beliefs: Part IV: A time of professional identity: 1970-1985—Would the real therapist please stand up? *OT Practice*, 15-18.
- Reed, K. L. & Peters, C. O. (2010). Values and beliefs: Part V: 1986-2000—Is this really occupational therapy? *OT Practice*, 15-18.